

CHAPTER I.
LIFE AND INFLUENCES

(A) LIFE

Graham Greene was born on 2nd October 1904. He attended Berkhamsted School in Hertfordshire, about twenty - five miles northwest of London, where his father was the headmaster. Graham, one of six children, hated the town and the school. To escape the all pervasive eyes of the school authorities, he took to solitary walks forbidden by the rules ; once he ran away from the school and hid on the common where he was found by his sister. Of these early years, during which he tried several times to commit suicide, he has written poignantly in "The Lost Childhood" and "The Revolver in the Corner Cupboard".

At seventeen he went to Oxford. He was not a scholar by temperament, although his changeable, mercurial character sometimes did long for scholastic success. He took a second in modern history. For six weeks, as a prank, he was a dues-paying member of the Communist Party. Also, he met Vivien Dayrell-Browning, an attractive Roman Catholic. At the age of twenty he published his first book, Babbling April, a collection of poems, that owed much to his reading of Edna St. Vincent Millay.

After his graduation from Balliol College, Oxford, he worked for four years as a sub-editor on The Times. At this time Greene showed a desire to go East, where there might be adventure, money and excitement. He took a job with a tobacco company because it offered the prospect of three years in China, but it never came to anything. He appeared also to have considered the consular service and the Nigerian Navy. At this time he became friendly with a Catholic priest, Father Trollope, and after three months of discussion he was received into the Catholic Church. The same priest married him to Vivien in October 1927. They had a

son and daughter. Later, Greene lived apart from his wife, although on friendly terms.

In 1929 Heinemann accepted the manuscript of his first novel, The Man Within, which was well received by the critics in England but was a failure in the United States. This novel was followed by The Name of Action (1930) and by Rumour at Nightfall (1931), two works that Greene has withdrawn from his bibliography and has encouraged his readers to forget. He established his reputation with his fourth novel, Stamboul Train (1932), which he classed as an "entertainment" in order to distinguish it from more serious work. In 1935 he made a journey across Liberia, described in Journey Without Maps, and on his return was appointed film critic of the Spectator. In 1938 he was commissioned to visit Mexico and report on the religious persecution there. As a result he wrote The Lawless Roads and, later, The Power and the Glory.

Brighton Rock was published in 1938, and in 1940 he became literary editor of the Spectator. The next year he undertook work for the Foreign Office and was sent to Sierra Leone in 1941. . . . One of his major post-war novels, The Heart of the Matter, is set in West Africa and is considered by many to be his finest book. This was followed by The End of the Affair, The Quiet American, a story set in Vietnam, Our Man in Havana, and A Burnt-Out Case. His novel, The Comedians, has been filmed, and in 1967 he published a collection of short stories under the title : May We Borrow Your Husband ? His most recent novel is Travels With My Aunt (1969).

Graham Greene is now a director of a London publishing firm. In all he has written some thirty novels, "entertainments," plays, children's books, travel books, and collections of essays and short stories. He was made a Companion of Honour in 1966.

(B) INFLUENCES

If one makes a study of the novels of Graham Greene, one will find that he is basically an original writer. However, one can trace various influences on his attitudes and ideas.

First of all, Greene is influenced by his early reading. "Perhaps it is only in childhood that books have any deep influence on our lives," says Greene in his essay "The Lost Childhood." His early reading was in Anthony Hope, Rider Haggard, and Majorie Bowen, stories of violence and adventure told with gusto and emphasized by melodrama. In the writings of Majorie Bowen, he says, he learned that people were not at all as good as Allan Quartermain nor as evil as the witch Gagool. From The Viper of Milan he experienced the fascination of evil, its reality, and found its place in his own life :

As for Visconti, with his beauty, his patience and his genius for evil, I had watched him pass by many a time in his black Sunday suit smelling of mothballs. His name was Carter. He exercised terror from a distance like a snowcloud over the young fields. Goodness had only once found a perfect incarnation in a human body and never will again, but evil can always find a home there. Human nature is not black and white but black and grey. I read all that in The Viper of Milan and I looked round and I saw that it was so.¹

This preoccupation with evil, with the black and the grey of human life, came upon Greene as a child. His early reading determined the pattern of his writing : "Imitation after imitation of Miss Bowen's magnificent novel went into the exercise books—stories of sixteenth-century Italy or twelfth-century England marked with enormous

¹Graham Greene, "The Lost Childhood". The Lost Childhood (London : Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1951), p.16.



brutality and a despairing romanticism. It was as if once and for all I had been supplied with a subject." He says :

...religion might later explain it to me in other terms, but the pattern was already there—perfect evil walking the world where perfect good can never walk again, and only the pendulum ensures that after all in the end justice is done! Man is never satisfied, and often I have wished that my hand had not moved further than King Solomon's Mines ... What is the good of wishing? The books are always there, the moment of crisis waits, and now our children are taking down the future and opening the pages?

Greene is also influenced by some major English novelists. His reading of Dickens' novels accounts for many of his seedy characters and for his grotesque children, his Else and young Parkis ; it also accounts in part for the social ire of such works as England Made Me, It's a Battlefield, and Brighton Rock. Greene's reading of Conrad taught him the nature of allegory and the importance of ethical choice as also did his reading of Bunyan. Lord Jim stands behind the whiskey priest, just as Axel Heyst, who cultivates pity as a form of contempt, stands behind Arthur Rowe and Major Scobie ; and Marlow and Heyst stand behind Fowler and Querry. Moreover, Conrad's anti-heroes relate in the same way to Pinkie Brown and James Raven. It is not surprising, therefore, that Greene says of Conrad in his book In Search of a Character :

Reading Conrad - the volume called Youth for the sake of Heart of Darkness - the first time since I abandoned him about 1932 because his influence on me was too great and too disastrous. The heavy hypnotic style falls around me again, and I am aware of my own. Perhaps

²Ibid., p. 17.

now I have lived long enough with my poverty to be safe from corruption. One day I will again read Victory and The Tigger.³

Greene's reading in Henry James taught him concern for style, for correctness, for the dissection of human motive ; James also taught him how to manipulate the stuff of evil while unfolding the complexities of character :

"There was no victory for human beings, that was his conclusion ; you were punished in your way, whether you were of God's or the Devil's party. James believed in the supernatural, but he saw evil as an equal force with good. Humanity was cannon fodder in a war too balanced ever to be concluded. If he had been guilty of the supreme egotism of preserving his own existence, he left the material, in his profound unsparing analysis, for rendering even egotism the highest kind of justice, of giving the devil his due!"⁴

With the death of James, Greene wrote, the English novel lost "the religious sense," and with it "the importance of the human act."

Greene is also influenced by T.S. Eliot. In his two thrillers, Stamboul Train and A Gun for Sale, Greene drew heavily on the atmosphere and symbols of Eliot's The Waste Land, and the sense of degeneracy and futility of the poem pervades them. In The Third Man, Vienna under the four power occupation allows Greene to develop many of The Waste Land images. The city itself is reminiscent of Eliot's Unreal City, and the title of the book owes as much to Eliot as it does to the Bible.

³Graham Greene, In Search of a Character (London : The Bodley Head, 1961), p. 31.

⁴"Henry James : The Private Universe," in The Lost Childhood; p. 30.

'Who is the third who walks always beside you ?
 When I count, there are only you and I together
 But when I look ahead up the white road
 There is always another one walking beside you
 Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded
 I do not know whether a man or a woman
 - But who is that on the other side of you ?"⁵

In England Made Me, Anthony is a sharpshooter. At a fair he shoots supremely well and wins for his efforts a vase, which Kate drops and breaks, and a toy tiger. Within the action of the novel, both these items assume symbolic proportions. Francis Kunkel, in The Labyrinthine Ways of Graham Greene, points out the symbolical implications of the tiger, "a symbol of Anthony's evasion of responsibility;" but he neglects the ironical, almost whimsical, reference to T.S. Eliot. The tiger is a symbol of Anthony's initiative and virility ; he promises it to Kate, but it is destined for Leo. The broken vase seems to suggest the impossibility of the brother-sister love relationship. Furthermore, the tiger leads the reader to Leo, and in Anthony's meeting with her on the North Bridge another Eliot note is struck :

"He thought, one could hardly be more wet if one had been fished up from the lake, and because a thought of that kind was apt to weigh like a cold compress too long on his brain, he laughed it away, "I'm a good swimmer." But it was not true. He had always feared the water : he had been flung into a bath to sink or swim by his father when he was six and he had sunk. For years afterwards he dreamed of death by drowning.

⁵"What the Thunder Said," The Waste Land, ll.359 - 65. Eliot says in a note to The Waste Land that the passage was stimulated by "...the account of one of the Antarctic expeditions : ...it was related that the party of explorers, at the extremity of their strength, had the constant delusion that there was one more member than could actually be counted."

But he had outwitted whatever providence it was that plotted always to fit a man with the death he most dreaded."⁶

In Brighton Rock, the grotesque images of evil owe a good deal to Eliot's The Waste Land : the broken windows, the ouija board, the gramophone, the Cosmopolitan Hotel, death by water; all have their counterparts in Eliot's poem.

Apart from the influence of some major English novelists, the influence from drama can also be seen in Greene's novels. At the end of Brighton Rock, a priest comforts Rose. At the end of The Heart of the Matter, Father Rank comforts Louise. These characters are not merely plot contrivances as they at first appear ; rather, they reestablish the ethical norms of behavior and a proper religious perspective after the passions of men have spent themselves. As in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, order must be reestablished before the spectator can be released. In Hamlet the audience leaves the theatre with the knowledge of Fortinbras' reestablishment of order in Denmark. At the end of Othello, Lodovico reestablishes law on the island of Cyprus and returns to Venice to relate the heavy deeds that have occurred.

It is also apparent that many of Greene's themes are directly influenced by the tragic vision. In both Brighton Rock and The Heart of the Matter, the main theme is the fall of man, a theme that is dealt with in many tragedies.

As stated above, it can be concluded that there are three main influences on Greene : the influence from his early reading, the influence from major English novelists,

⁶Graham Greene, England Made Me (London Heinemann, 1935), p. 149.

and the influence from drama. Graham Greene can thus be considered in two different ways. He is primarily an original novelist, bringing his own individual vision to his creations. He is also however, an element in the main tradition of the English novel, absorbing ideas from those before him, and in his turn passing on ideas.